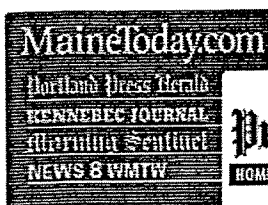


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Wednesday, June 23, 2004

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Skip the dump, avoid the legwork and visit Maine's online junkyard

By From staff and news services,

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 Also on this page:
[ON THE WEB](#)

Psssst. Yeah, you.

Interested in getting some great stuff for free, from other folks right here in Maine? As in gratis? No money down, no payments? No driving around Portland neighborhoods during heavy item pickup week, or visiting the Cape Elizabeth dump on a Saturday?

What kind of stuff? How about a 16-foot catamaran? Not the sailing type? How about a self-cleaning gas range? A Star Trek board game? A guinea pig or two?

The catch? There ain't one.

The owners of this stuff just want to get rid of it, pronto - spring cleaning and whatnot. Interested? OK, all you need to know is this: Freecycle.org.

The Web site began a year ago as one do-gooder's bright idea, a way of getting another life out of office furniture and equipment that would otherwise land in a landfill.

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Enough is

Nearly 3/4 of all Mainers will die from one of these diseases: Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Lung Disease, Diabetes, Cancer.

These diseases are mostly caused by:
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Enough is enough.

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7/22/2004


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REAL Cities
Network Affiliate

Groups recently formed in Maine, and they have been fairly active. There are 693 members in seven groups around the state. The largest group by far is the Portland one, with 385 members. People in that group have offered everything from turtles (painted and mud) to bed frames. They've gone to Freecycle looking for children's clothes, coffee makers and building materials.

Laurie McKnight of Dayton said the site saved her after the last batch of big rainstorms that moved through southern Maine. She and her husband, David, discovered that their roof leaked. On a tight budget, they didn't know what to do.

"We had no money and I was freaking out," said McKnight.

She put a note out to the Freecycle e-mail list and soon received offers of unwanted roofing tiles, nails and other stuff needed to fix their leaky roof.

"We got the materials to fix the roof, which was amazing to me," said McKnight. "I still don't know these people's names, I just know them from the site."

From its first days in Tucson, Ariz., Freecycle has become a worldwide movement, with chapters in all 50 states and 17 other countries.

Think of it as an online junkyard. Or eBay, except there's no bidding and no money changes hands. Here's how it works:

A person signs up for a Freecycle message group in their area through Yahoo.com at no charge. Members then post messages, offering their wares to the first taker ("OFFERED: Patio furniture") or seeking goods ("WANTED: 1970 Chevelle parts").

If you want something that's posted, or have something that's wanted, you respond to the person who posted the message. The giver and taker arrange to meet somewhere for the handoff, and the deal is done.

"I listed that I wanted a boat. Somebody contacted me six days later with a boat," said Sean Kinney, a 27-year-old underemployed graphic designer from Woodbridge, N.J. "They said it needs a little bit of repair work, but other than that, it's fine. I asked them if they wanted money for it, and they said, 'No, we're just looking to get it off our property.' "

The groups are geographically based because, as founder Deron Beal explains, "How far are you willing to drive for a pile of dirt, or an old mattress, or a desk? A half-hour, maybe? One city of, say, 40,000 is enough to carry a group. Bigger is not better."

There's a real online community that has developed around the strong Maine ideal of waste-not, want-not, said McKnight, the Dayton resident. Many people on the list have exchanged plant seedlings and cuttings, she said, and there's a big environmental



benefit.

"It's less stuff in the landfills, and when you need something it's wonderful to find it for free," she said.

Freecycle is doing more than clearing out people's garages and cutting down on landfill waste, though that would certainly be enough. By taking money out of the equation, it's allowing people to indulge their whims - even whims they didn't know they had.

Kinney, the graphic designer, found himself more than a boat. He also spotted an ab-roller (actual name: Denise Austin Torso Toner), and was inspired.

"I just got back from a cruise and I have a little bit of a gut," he said. "I saw it listed on there, and I was like, 'You know what? I see that stuff on TV all the time. I might as well give it a shot.' "

Staff Writer Matt Wickenheiser contributed to this report.

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